

Opening Statement of Subcommittee Republican Leader Bob Latta
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Legislating to Safeguard the Free and Open Internet”
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As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning and welcome to our panel of witnesses. While I am always happy to be here with my colleagues to learn more from the real experts on important issues in the telecom space, I have to admit I’m confused why we need to spend another entire hearing on net neutrality less than a month after talking about the same thing.

In the meantime, the majority has introduced essentially the same bill that has already failed to garner the support of their entire caucus as a CRA in the last Congress. Make no mistake, there are a lot of different ways for Congress to go about protecting consumers with permanent net neutrality rules. For example, the bill I introduced last month is based on Chairman Waxman’s approach in 2010 and my colleagues, Republican Leader Walden and Mrs. Rodgers, offered two more bills based on the rules from the FCC’s 2015 order and Washington State’s bipartisan legislation from 2018. These bills all originated from

Democratic net neutrality proposals or laws. Anyone interested in a bipartisan legislative solution would consider each of them to be a reasonable starting point for a real discussion.

In contrast, the majority came to that hearing with no new ideas. Since that time, we have not heard a word from them until they were ready to announce yet another net neutrality hearing. Worst of all, instead of engaging with us to try to solve the problem, my colleagues have retrenched back to the most extreme position in this debate.

The idea that only Title II is “real” net neutrality is dangerous and wrong. Those who are newer to this subcommittee or to this debate should not be fooled. You have heard over and over again that we need to protect consumers from blocking, throttling, and internet “fast lanes,” which sounds reasonable enough. Well, we can easily do all of this without giving the government free rein over the internet through the specter of Title II.

Everyone who has followed this net neutrality debate on even the most superficial level is aware that Title II is a nonstarter with Republicans, and even with some Democrats. It has no chance of ever

passing the Senate or being signed by the President. Yet here we are in a repetitive hearing followed by a string of partisan victories that will simply ensure that everyone digs in further and nothing meaningful ever gets done to protect consumers.

Even if there were a chance that the majority's Title II bill could become law, we now know unequivocally that it would be the wrong direction for rural America. As we heard from Mr. Franell at our last hearing, and from countless other rural carriers as well, Title II was a devastatingly effective investment killer for the small ISPs, who we need to be expanding to serve more of our constituents in rural America. At that hearing, so many members on both sides of the aisle engaged Mr. Franell with questions and concerns about this impact. There seemed to be an overwhelming bipartisan interest in working to close that digital divide and get modern broadband service out to communities that are being left behind. So why aren't we spending our time working together on that instead of putting the crushing regulatory regime of Title II back onto the folks we need to be out there investing and expanding? It makes no sense.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and with that I yield back.